

## [The Hay, Grain, and Coal Man Just Chats]

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

NAME OF WORKER ROBERT WILDER

ADDRESS NORTHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

DATE OF INTERVIEW DECEMBER 19 1938

SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT GEORGE O. DUNNELL NORTHFIELD,  
MASSACHUSETTS

PLACE OF INTERVIEW

The following interview took place in the office of the G. O. Dunnell Hay, Grain and Coal Company in Northfield, Massachusetts.

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Mr. Dunnell was wrestling with a couple of grain sacks when we dropped into the shack by the railroad track that serves as his office.

“Hello! Come in”, his greeting was a little strained, his face even redder than the wind and weather had stained it, as he pushed, pulled and maneuvered one heavy sack across the floor. [?]

“Here, you need a hand with that”, we grabbed one end and started to pull.

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“Say, thanks, the boy's gone deliverin' and I got to get these loaded before train time. Told one of the boys to get it done this mornin' but he forgot it. Forget! Forget!——” The rest of the diatribe was lost in heaving and hauling.

The task completed, Mr. Dunnell seated himself in his usual place — on the upturned coal scuttle and picked up an axe lying at hand.

“Yep, I guess I've got her so she'll cut,” he said. [?] [I can't keep a sharp axe around here. The boys use them to split kindling and try to cut nails with 'em, I guess. But I'll hide this one out on 'em. I made the helve myself, and I've worked the head down thinner with this stone. Guess she'll do.?] “ There was a time when all this country around her here was full of fellers cutting trees. Then everybody got scairt. Said that if we cut the trees all the streams would / dry up. I didn't believe it. Gosh! we get all the water we want now, don't we? Quite a bit 13 more'n necessary to keep the springs full, seems to me. Yes sir. [?] “ But what I was thinking was how us fellers used to cut wood all winter and sell it to the mills in the valley. They all burned wood then under the boilers, and so did the railroads. That's what the farmers done to get cash money - cut off their wood lots and sold the wood. It helped to keep 'em goin' in the seasons when farming wasn't so good. Can't do it now. Nobody wants the wood and yet it's growing everywhere. Maybe if they want to stop these floods they'd better scheme out a way of using wood, so's we'd cut it off again and dry up a few springs. “ I hear someone has figured out a way of using them pine trees they have down south — of making paper from 'em. Ever been south? They burn that wood down there and the smoke coming out of the chimneys would make you swear that they were burning coal. I drove down there once with the boys. I'd heard that they tapped the pines for turpentine same as we do for maple sap. I had the boys stop once or twice and got out and looked in the little holders they had on the trees, but I didn't see nothing. Maybe the feller had been around and gathered it all in. We went down to Floridy — to Miami. And when we got there we went to a hotel, registered, and left our satchels. Then we went out and drove around to see the place. We went over a bridge over a swamp, I

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guess, and went all around. When the time came to go back to the hotel, I says, et “Bet you can't find that hotel where we left our satchels. It's getting late and we better find out where 14 that hotel is, “ I says. The boys just laughed and kept on driving. After awhile they stopped. “ What yer stopping for? “ I asked. “ To let you out at the hotel, “ they says. “ We got to find a place to park the car. “ “ Go on with yer “ , , “ I says. “ This ain't the hotel where we left our satchels! “ 'tis too, ' they says, “Go on in. “ And it was. Yer can't lose these young people these days if they're in a car. There I was all turned around so that I didn't know where I was and they knowing all the time.

[We got a word in hurriedly. “You must have had some trip to Florida. How'd you like it down there.”

“First rate. Fine. Now take it up here in the country. I can lose them boys every time.” Mr. Dunnell had no mind to talk Florida when he had something else to say. ?] [?] But “ They can't go through the woods the way we could when we was young. They get lost in no time. They get lost berrying up on the old farm where I was born and where they been goin' ever since they was born. ‘Course it's all grown up to brush and trees now. But the same stone walls are there. [Funnier though, that my brother gets lost on the same place.

“I'm deaf in one ear. When you're deaf in one ear you can't tell the direction that a sound is coming from. I was out berrying with my brother last year, and we got separated. We were right on the old place — where he was born — played as a kid — and worked as a young man. Every so often held call and I'd answer. He didn't want?] 4 to get separated. But I didn't have no idea where he was. He'd have to find me. But I'd know where the camp was all right. I'd ask him, “Which way to the camp?” “Mister”, he'd say, “you'll have to ask somebody else — I don't know.”

“Shucks, it was easy up there. The stone walls was just where they were years ago; they hadn't moved a mite. ‘Course where they used to be houses there's nothing now but sullen holes.

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"Don't mean to have you think that I never got lost. 'Course I did. I don't mean real lost. I knew where I was all right. But it was the direction things was in that had me turned around.

"Last time I was up to my camp in the hills, I thought I would go out and find a three prong black cherry and cut it off to use for a stand. You've seen 'em. The three prongs make the-legs, some of the trunk the uprights and we generally saw a slice off a big trunk for the top. Well, I started out one monnin mornin' . Up on those hills when there is a fog it is a real fog. I kind of had to cut my way through it with my axe. It was you was telling me about that feller up to Sky Farm that plowed right off the fog into the clouds, and had a hell of a time getting back, wasn't it? Well, that's the kind of a fog it was. I thought I knew where there was some likely cherry so I walked across the old orchard, clumb the fence — stone wall 'twas — and sure enough there was plenty of cherry. But none of 'em had the prongs just right. I kept on looking and walking around. Couldn't see much over a rod in any direction. And finally I got sick of it, 5 and turned around and started home. That is, back to the camp. I knew where 'twas all right — or thought I did — on account of the lay of the land. All I had to do was walk up hill, I thought. But when I come to the stone wall, I see 'twasn't the place I crossed when I came down, and things didn't look just right. After a while I come to another stone wall where they ought not to have been any. And I've lived around here, Mister, long enough to know that stone walls don't move all by themselves. And I didn't figure that anybody had moved that wall. I figured that I was walking north when I ought to have been walking east. I turned east and rammed through the bushes and things in a straight line. And finally I come out at the camp. And, by gum, what do yer think? Right there in sight of the place I started from was just the three prong cherry tree I was wasting my time looking for.

"Say that reminds me. Did I ever tell you about that feller, name of Upton, who used to live up there. He was a big six foot. Weighed over two hundred and hard as nails. Good-natured feller he was, unless he was pushed too far. He never bragged how strong he was

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nor nothing. I remember he used to keep turkeys. Lots of folks did then. They let 'em ran loose — no fences nor nothin'. Well, these turkeys got down on to a feller's place by the name of Plumb. Plumb didn't like it, and when Upton come down to drive 'em home, Plumb pitched into him. And he pitched in to him with a pitchfork. Bound and determined he was to stick the fork right in to Upton.

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Upton didn't like it. Finally he got mad. And he took that pitchfork away from Plumb and give him a darn good licking. Maybe he licked him a little too hard. Anyway, Plumb died a few days later. But they never done nothing to Upton. People liked him. Today, there'd be a terrible row.

“One time a feller come down from Vermont. Drove into Upton's yard and told him that he was the best ‘rassler in Vermont and had heard of how Upton was the best ‘rassler in Massachusetts. And how he had come down to take hold of him. Upton told him that he was wrong about the ‘rassling. That he wa'n't no ‘rassler, as the feller'd find out, but it seemed a shame for the feller to come all the way down from Vermont for nothing, so he would take hold of him. Upton was just plain strong. He didn't know nothing about ‘rassling. But they went to it on the barn floor, and the first thing he wound his leg around the Vermont Feller's so's be broke the Vermont feller's leg. And he had to pick him up and put him in his buggy and start him back to Vermont.

“Somehow, in some trade, Upton got hold of a hotel property that stood off in the woods. Couple fellers from Northfield run it, but the lumberjacks come in from the woods every time they give a dance — which was mostly Saturday nights, and broke up the dance — smashed chaire chairs and things. The Northfield fellers was afraid to mix in with the lumberjacks and let 'em do just as they had a mind to. When Upton come things was different. For a week or so nothing happened at the 7 dances. They run off all right. And then the lumberjacks seen that Upton was so good-natured they thought they would go right along having their fun. Anyway, one of 'em who was drunk busted a chair on purpose.

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When Upton seen that, he went right to the head lumberjack and said that he and his men was welcome to come to the dances as long as they behaved themselves. But if they couldn't they'd have to get out. The lumberjack said, 'You ain't got no business with me, Mister.' Upton said that he owned the place, and that as long as he did, he intended to run it. The lumberjacks come crowding around, 'cause naturally, their boss was a tough man. He had to be to keep the upper hand of those rough, tough, lumberjacks of his, and the gang wanted to see what was going to happen. Upton talked easy and gentle, and the boss lumberjack got louder and louder. Upton kinder moved around slow so he got the boss lumberjack with his back to a flight of stairs. When Upton had him set where he wanted him, he let fly an uppercut so fast that nobody saw it. All the crowd saw was the boss lumberjack sail out into the air and down those stairs with an awful bump and smash. He went clean to the bottom. An' then lumberjacks begun to follow him down — every which way. The jacks was so surprised, they didn't get a blow in. All Upton had to do was grab and heave — all but a few who said they'd behave. He let them stay. Some of the others come back, too. But not the boss. They had to pick him up and carry him to the hospital. He was all broke up.

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"Ever up that way towards Somerset Dam? You pass where the hotel was. I ain't been around there for a good many years. Last time I went, I went in an automobile before they had tops. Didn't have no roads either except carriage roads, and all the horses was afraid of automobiles. We passed a farm and they was a couple of loose horses in the yard. One a big, old, long-legged horse and the other smaller. They danced around some — scared as all get out of the auto. But after we got by they come out in the road and looked after us. Guess they started to foller us. Anyway, they was another automobile behind us that the horses didn't know about. And when it come chugging in sight a-kicking up the dust, the horses was scared and tried to get away from it, so they run after us. I was sitting on the back seat. And I never did see a horse run as fast as that long-legged one. He gained on us fast and they wa'n't no place for him to go to get around us. Just a narrer road with

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bushes and rocks on both sides. The only way he could get by was to run right over us. And the way, he was lifting those long legs of his into the air, I got scairt that he was goin' to do just that. I hollered to the feller who was driving, 'Give her some more steam, can't yer?' He opened her up. I don't know how fast we was going but prob'ly thirty miles an hour. Plenty fast enough for them days and that road. But the old long-legged horse kept right up, his eyes sticking out, and them long legs of his clawin' at the back of the car, an' so dam much dust you couldn't see nothin' else. Well, by God! You'd a-thought that long-legged horse would a-got winded some 9 time. But he didn't. Finally, we come to an open field one side of the road, and the horse took to it. He run by us, and is goin' yet for all I know. I know, though, that I was good and scared. I didn't like the idea of a long-legged horse climbing over the back of an automobile into my lap.

"Got to be gitting home, you say? Don't need to hurry on my account. Say how much do I owe you for helping with them sacks? Nothing? Just a neighborly act? Well, I snum. I thought neighborly acts had gone out of style. That's the way we used to do when we was young. But now-a-days everybody has become a good business man and won't turn a wheel, 'less'n they get paid. Let me tell you, the world was a pleasanter place when everybody didn't think so damned much about money. Had a little fun as they went along, even if it did cost something.

"What kind of a wallet is this I have? That's a deerskin wallet, tanned by a couple of fellers that used to live with the Indians. Yer see, I've got a pretty big hand. I can't get it into an ordinary wallet handy and make change. I tried to use one of those bags they carry coins in to the bank, but 'twa'n't big enough, so I used to use a salt bag. And the folks didn't like it when we went to a hotel somewheres, perhaps down in Floridy, and I pulled out a salt bag every time somebody wanted some money. The folks — my wife and daughter — like to eat in fancy restaurants. Home's good enough for me. And if I do go out, I'd just as soon eat anywheres. But not them. They're always saying things ain't clean in restaurants; or they don't put good milk or eggs in the stuff 10 they make. So they have to go to the fancier places, the kind of eatin eatin' houses where they have table cloths and waiters. I

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can't see it makes much difference. Probably they use the same kind of food as the other places, but they dress it up so's you don't know what you're eatin'. Well, as I was saying sayin' , these fellers had given this deerskin to my daughter. Yer can see how soft and nice and white it was. 'Course now I got it pretty well covered with coal dust. She cut a corner off the deerskin and sewed me up this. I've had it a good many years now.

"Well, glad you come. Come again. I don't git so much talkin' done in a month as I do when you come down. Come again." STATE MASSACHUSETTS

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DATE OF INTERVIEW JANUARY 31, 1939

SUBJECT LIVING LORE

NAME OF INFORMANT GEORGE O. DUNNELL

ADDRESS NORTHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Mr Dunnell had just returned from a trip to Florida when we dropped into his office near the railroad tracks for a chat. The last time we had been to see him, Mr Dunnell had been plainly eager to make the trip, although feeling a little homesick at the prospect of leaving Northfield in the winter. This, time, after two weeks in the land of sunshine, Mr Dunnell was frankly glad to be back home.

We wanted to get Mr Dunnell to express some comparisons between the Southlands and the North, to weave in a few oldtime stories to illustrate his beliefs and opinions, but Mr Dunnell does not follow in a conversation — he leads. Although we felt the interview a disappointment in some ways, we did glimpse here and there, as he talked on, more about Mr Dunnell than he realized he was revealing.



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Outwardly Mr Dunnell gives the impression of hard boiled indifference to the countryside in which he has lived so long and where his father lived before him. To the casual observer Mr Dunnell rails against the government with the resentment of the die-hard, the hick from the sticks. Neither impression is correct. Actually Mr Dunnell has a deep-seated kinship with Northfield and its surroundings. No other place would probably ever satisfy him or meet the requirements set up by his standard — northern Massachusetts. Nor are his panegyrics about the [governemt?], merely noise. There is a common sense attitude about them, a clarity of perception and an acceptance of fact not often found in cities.